A

COMPLETE GUIDE

to the

Instruments

of the

BANJO FAMILY

Full details of each instrument - scale length, tuning, number of frets, etc. - together with illustration, enabling anyone to identify all the instruments of the banjo family.

INVALUABLE TO THE ENTHUSIAST & DEALER.

Compiled by

A. P. SHARPE

(Editor of "B.M.G.")

PRICE 2/- NETT.

CLIFFORD ESSEX MUSIC Co., Ltd.

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EVERY PLAYER OF A

FRETTED INSTRUMENT

SHOULD READ

B.M.G.

Edited by A. P. SHARPE

"B.M.G." brings to you each month all the latest news of the fretted instrument world; instructive articles by distinguished writers; concert and club notes; biographies and photographs of famous players; details of recently issued fretted instrument gramophone records; correspondence from readers on every kind of fretted instrument topic. In addition to this, every issue of "B.M.G." contains a four-page music supplement that is alone worth more than the price of a year's subscription.

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Introduction

THE banjo's coming back," we are repeatedly hearing—but it never "went anywhere" as far as the real enthusiast is concerned ! It is true that when the plectrum-played guitar reared its head in dance bands, way back in the early 'thirties', the banjo's strident voice fell in disfavour with devotees of the sophisticated music then extant—but the genuine banjoist, the person who played the instrument because of a love for it, never gave up playing for his own amusement or in company with a few other enthusiasts in his own locality.

Over the past fifteen or twenty years there have been some attempts to "bring the banjo back" into popular favour but these attempts have (usually) meant nothing more than a toneless banjo being inexpertly plunked in the background (or even the foreground!) of a nineteen-twenties' type of dance band—complete with belching sousaphone!

More recently, the "trad jazz" craze gave the listening public a chance to hear the banjo's voice again but the monotonous elementary chord-plunk-

ing on the instrument, usually grossly mishandled to give a sound similar to what one hears on the crude pre-electric records of the true jazz era, did nothing to make anyone want to hear the banjo again. Luckily for lovers of the banjo, the "trad fad" quickly died.

At the present time we have what are called "bluegrass" banjoists making the banjo's cheery voice heard again all over the world. Probably sparked off by the banjo-playing of Earl Scruggs for the signature tune of the popular TV series "The Beverly Hillbillies", everywhere one finds keen people taking up the banjo to "play bluegrass." This style of playing, with its constant use of the short octave string, is certainly doing much to bring back the finger-played five-string banjo into popular favour.

The style of playing used by these "bluegrass" exponents has a tendency to monotony (even when performed by such leading exponents as Earl Scruggs, Roger Sprung, Roy Clark, *et al.*) but no doubt "bluegrass" devotees will progress from this type of music they perform—just as the early banjo-playing pioneers did when *they* used the same style of playing for their early jigs, breakdowns and hornpipes a hundred years ago.

It could be said that the banjo has turned full circle and is now repeating its former rise in popularity. At the turn of the century it was "the thing" to play the banjo and Royalty, Society and people in all other walks of life boasted of their banjo-playing prowess.

All the signs point to it. The demand for banjos—good quality banjos—is on the increase and cannot be met by present-day manufacturers who seem loath to invest money in the instrument. Monstrosities that have lain hidden in attics or junk shops for many many years are being unearthed, dusted off and abortive attempts made to make them playable. Many of these old attic discoveries and junk-shop "finds" are virtually useless as musical instruments. Most are the crude large and deep hoop tack-head "tubs" of the minstrel era whilst some are even six- and seven-string unfretted instruments over eighty years old that were never intended for anything more ambitious than an elementary vamping accompaniment to a "coon song". Neither are worth spending any money on.

A banjo—a properly constructed, playable banjo—is a true musical instrument of intricate manufacture and intrinsic value. Such an instrument. cannot be purchased for £10 or so.

High quality instruments *can* cost as much as £200 or more; one pays for quality materials, high-class workmanship and, above all, TONE. A highly decorated banjo may have eye-appeal but decoration is not what one judges a banjo by.

One should not expect a high-quality instrument without being prepared to pay for it. It is true the "bargain" may be found, in the same way one may discover the "old master" at the back of the shop round the corner but the chances of the former are as remote as the latter. If you have yet to buy a banjo, go to the specialist and you will not waste your money.

This book is published in the hope it will answer the many questions asked by would-be players of the banjo and the many dealers who sell instruments of the banjo family and often lack the knowledge necessary to speak intelligently of them.

The following pages are a condensed version of a chapter from a major work* in course of preparation, in which the author attempts to compile the first complete history of the banjo.

**The Banjo Story*, by A. P. Sharpe.

Banjo Family

IN the early days of the banjo—long before commercial manufacture commenced—the design, scale length and other constructional details were far from standard and, more often than not, were dictated by the person fashioning the instrument from the materials at hand.

When the banjo started to be made commercially, the instrument was already being played by trained musicians who could suggest and often indicate improvements in both design and playability.

The introduction of strings made specially for the banjo enabled the hitherto excessively long scale length to be shortened to a more practicable length and the pitch of the strings conveniently raised. The introduction of raised frets led the way to more advanced "position" playing and this, in turn, led to worthwile developments —such as non-slipping pegs; more satisfactory ways of keeping the vellum taut; more efficient tail pieces for anchoring the strings; etc.—all of which made the banjo a better and more

satisfactory instrument to play.

The early pioneers were true experimenters and whilst in the majority of cases they saw the goal for which they strived, some developments in construction came about through trial and error.

Eventually an overall "standard" was achieved and whilst some individual makers departed from this at times, in general the banjo and its associated instruments reached the norm as indicated in the following pages.

Common to the majority of the instruments of the banjo family is (a) the method of fitting the vellum to a wire and the system of applying tension to the vellum when on the instrument; (b) the construction of the hoop; (c) the method of "marrying" the arm to the hoop. Where there are variations, these are mentioned.

The hoop (or "drum") *of any of the banjo family of instruments can be made entirely of wood or metal—and if made of metal, this can be cast or spun. The hoop (from 10 to 12 inches

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* Refer to pages 20 and 21 for the names of all banjo parts and pages 22 and 23 for a full list of these names with alternatives.

in diameter—although 11 inches is considered standard) can be a metal shell with a wooden lining, or a wooden shell encircled by a metal band spun over the top edge with, usually, another metal band an inch or so in width, circling the hoop and serving as an "anchor" for the shoes.

The method of tightening the vellum is by a top-band (or bezel) which rests upon the vellum-wire. Tension-bolts (termed "brackets and nuts") engage this top-band round its perimeter (the number can vary from as little as ten to as many as thirty-two—twenty-four being normal) and these brackets and nuts pass through "shoes" which are fixed to the outside of the hoop by means of holding screws from inside the hoop. The hook of the bracket grips (or hooks into) the top-band which bears down on the vellum wire outside the main hoop. By a half-turn on each nut in turn round the complete hoop it is possible to apply tension to the vellum until the desired tension is achieved.

The scale length of any instrument is measured by the distance between nut and bridge—or, more correctly, by measuring the distance from the nut to the twelfth fret and doubling this distance to give the correct position of

the bridge on the vellum. Many years ago it was determined that the best position for the bridge (tonally) is about two-thirds across the vellum from where the arm of the instrument meets the hoop, *i.e.* the bridge is placed about one-third of the diameter of the vellum away from the tailpiece.

The maker of the instrument determines this exact position by the length of the fingerboard he uses and he works out his fretting scale accordingly. Not all makers have used the same fretting scale so the actual length of a banjo arm can vary.

An occasional new set of strings; a new bridge; a new vellum at least once a year—all will repay you in producing the best results from your instrument.

* * *

The vellum on a banjo should be "board tight". Half a turn on each nut all round the hoop will apply even tension and help give the instrument a snappy tone. There is nothing worse than a banjo sounding "puddingy" because of a flabbly vellum.

It should be pointed out that music for the banjo is written an octave higher than it sounds —the short line through the clef sign in this booklet indicating this:-

Banjo

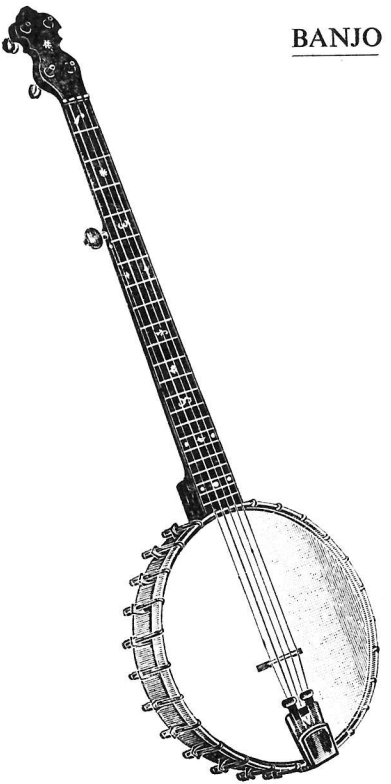
THE BANJO has five strings, tuned:

but it should be mentioned that in England we did know six- and seven-stringed banjos at one time. Such instruments were in a minority and eventually disappeared to give way to the standard five-string instrument.

The scale length of the banjo varies between 25 inches and 27 inches and the standard size hoop is eleven inches in diameter. During the dance-band boom of the 'twenties a number of 12 inch-hoop instruments were made and some soloists in the days of gut strings found a 12 inch-hoop gave them a more "throaty" sound, but the larger vellum did not find favour with players who preferred a brighter sound.

There are generally twenty-two frets on the standard banjo fingerboard. In the early commercial days of the instrument some makers did not fit frets to the complete fingerboard, so some early banjos can be found with only 18 or 20 frets fitted; the rest of the

BANJO



fingerboard being left blank.

(A banjo with a 12 inch hoop usually loses 2 frets, *i.e.* it only has 20 frets).

Most banjos of quality are fitted with an ebony fingerboard which is inlaid with (usually) mother-of-pearl "positions", which may be plain dots or ornately-designed shapes with engravings on them. The position guides are inserted between certain frets—usually the 3rd, 5th, 7th, 10th, 12th, 14th, 17th, 19th and 22nd. Some American banjos have a position-marking at the 9th fret instead of the 10th.

The banjo arm istelf extends by means of a perchpole (or "dowel stick") as it is called in the U.S.A.) beneath the vellum across the diameter of the hoop and fits into a socket (or "patent" fitting) on the inner side of the hoop, thus making the whole instrument rigid. The arm is usually held firm by means of a pair of wedges between the hoop and a wedge-plate fixed to the perchpole at the heel and an end-screw at the other end.

The fifth (short) string of the banjo is tuned by means of a peg inserted at right angles into the arm by the side of the fifth fret. Some makers used a tube under the fingerboard for this string, like on the zither-banjo, thus eliminat-

ing the side peg. When such a tube was incorporated in the banjo, the fifth string entered the tube at the fifth fret and was carried under the fingerboard up to the peghead which housed a fifth peg.

The peghead of the banjo normally houses four pegs—sometimes push-in type pegs as used on the violin, but more usually non-slip or geared pegs. All types of banjo pegs are fitted at right angles to the plane of the arm, being pushed in tapered holes or fitted through the back of the head.

(In post war years, because of the shortage of high class non-slip or geared pegs, some Continental makers have used single guitar machines for the banjo and these protude at each side of the peghead).

Because of its hoop construction the banjo is often referred to as the "open-back" banjo. However, a resonator can be (and often is) fitted to the instrument to increase its tonal volume.

There is no "standard" type of strings for the banjo—although at first players used all gut strings with a covered-on silk 4th. When proper strings were made for this banjo, variations were produced. Nylon has taken the place of gut today.

The various combinations of strings used for the banjo are given:-

(1) Plain plated wire 1st, 2nd and 5th. Covered-on-wire 3rd and 4th.
(2) As above but with a covered-on-nylon 4th.
(3) As (1) but with a nylon-filament 3rd and 5th and a nylon-covered 4th.
(4) With nylon-filament 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 5th and a nylon-covered 4th. (This would be the equivalent to the all-gut strung banjo).

* * *

Before going on to the other instrument of the banjo family we should, perhaps, here mention the extra-long, so-called "folk banjo" Pete Seeger (the American folk singer) made popular in the late 1950's and which was subsequently played by most "bluegrass" banjoists—of whom Earl Scruggs and Roger Sprung are the leaders.

This instrument has five strings, tuned:-

This banjo has a normal 11 inch hoop but an extra-long fingerboard with 25

frets and a 32 inch scale length. It is, in fact, a normal banjo with three extra frets at the nut end. The octave peg is fitted opposite the eighth fret.

The extra-long neck of these banjos appears to have been inspired by the early banjos made in the days when strings would only tune up to the A tuning—but as most players of these long-neck banjos today use the capo d'astro and, more often than not, start with this device at the third fret, the necessity for the long neck is obscure.

* * *

Zither-Banjo

THE ZITHER-BANJO is really a constructional variation of the banjo and as such has five strings tuned to the same pitch and notes.

This type of instrument started with W. Temlett's patent closed-back banjo of 1869 (Temlett always called himself the "pioneer of the zither-banjo"). The American C. E. Dobson patented an "Improved Closed Back" banjo in 1878 but it was Alfred D. Cammeyer (an American who had settled in England) who perfected the zither-banjo and introduced it to this country in 1888.

The vellum diameter of the zither-

THE ZITHER-BANJO

banjo varies between 7 inches and 9 inches and it rests on a circular metal casting suspended in a wooden hoop with convex back, approximately 9 inches to 11 inches in diameter, by metal "S"-shaped brackets (varying in number) affixed to the upper edge of the wooden hoop. The top-band (or bezel) is usually of cast metal with a number of lugs round its diameter through which pass screwed bolts which engage in the tapped holes in corresponding lugs on the inside casting. By tightening these screws, pressure is applied to the top-band which then increases tension on the vellum.

Zither-banjos have always dispensed with the side fifth peg; the octave string passing through a tube inserted under the fingerboard and emerging at the peghead. It has been usual to fit guitar machine-heads to the zither-banjo so that the peghead presents a "three-a-side" appearance—although only five of the tuning mechanisms are used. (Some manufacturers have in the past produced machine-heads specially for the zither-banjo, with two pegs on the bass side and three on the treble side but the balanced machine heads present a better appearance). The machine heads are usually fitted vertically in a cut-out recessed head.

In the beginning the zither-banjo was always played by vibrating the strings with the nails of the right hand (these were developed and carefully tended by the true artist for this purpose) and the instrument was particularly suited for the slower type of solo where sostenuto could be employed. When forced, the zither-banjo is inclined to produce overtones and true staccato playing is difficult (if not impossible) to perform on it. The instrument has a distinctive tone all its own; with an inclination to "wiriness."

There is no "standard" stringing for the zither-banjo but the following sets of banjo strings are used:-

(1) Plain wire plated 1st, 2nd and 5th.
Nylon-filament 3rd.
Nylon-covered 4th.

(2) As above but with a silk-covered 4th.

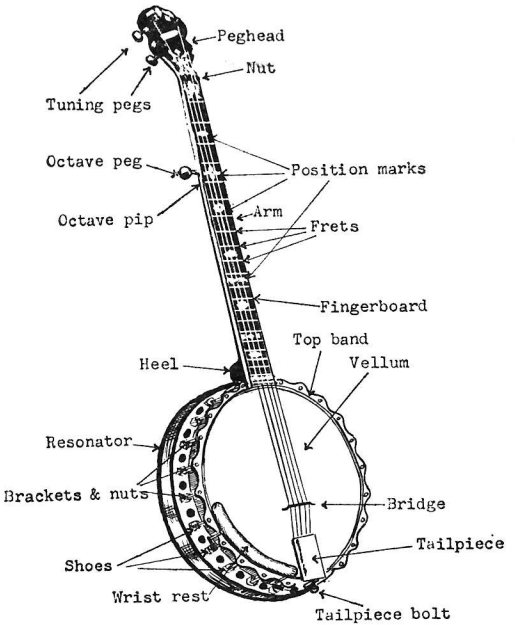
(3) Plain wire plated 1st, 2nd and 5th. Wire-covered 3rd and 4th.

(4) As (3) but with nylon-covered or silk-covered 4th.

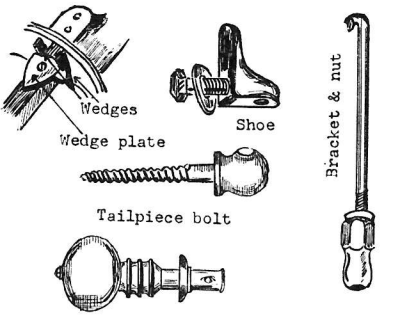
Never use the incorrect strings on your instrument. Do not be put off by a salesman telling you (for instance) that a "guitar 1st" will do for the first string on the plectrum-banjo. Strings of the wrong material and/or gauge can do irreparable damage to a banjo.

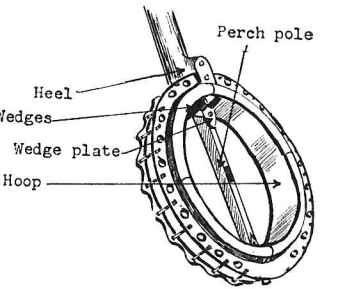
BANJO FAMILY

NAMES OF THE PARTS OF A BANJO



BANJO FAMILY





(See next page)

Nomenclature

BELOW we list the usual names for the various parts of the instruments of the banjo family and opposite we give alternative descriptions used by various people at various times.

It is always advisable to use the more usual name when referring to a part of the banjo.

* * *

Arm ..... Neck, Handle, Stick, Pole.

Brackets & Nuts .. Wires (& Nuts), Strainers, Rods. Vellum strainers. Tension hooks.

Bridge ..... Lower string-spacer.

Fingerboard ..... Fretboard, Keyboard.

Frets ..... Fingerboard wires. Note makers.

Heel ..... Arm butt. Neck joint.

Hoop ..... Drum, Body, Shell.

Nut ..... Top bridge, Upper string-spacer.

Octave Peg ..... Thumb peg. Fifth peg. Drone peg.

Octave Pip ..... Thumb-peg nut. Octave nut. Fifth-string nut. Drone string nut.

Perchpole ..... Dowel stick. Arm extension. Shaft.

BANJO FAMILY

Peghead .....Tuning head. Head. Peg-top.

Position Marks ..Keyboard markers. Finger-board markers.

Resonator .....Reflector plate. Back, Sound reflector, Tone amplifier.

Shoes.....Bracket holders. Bracket guides.

Strings .....Wires, Cords.

Tailpiece .....String anchor. Fishtail.

Tailpiece Bolt ....Tailpiece holder. Tailpiece anchor. Tailbolt. Endpin.

Top Band .....Bezel. Vellum strainer. Vellum holder. Vellum retaining ring.

Tuning Pegs ....Tuners. Machines. String tighteners.

Vellum .....Head. Drum. Skin. Sound-board. Parchment.

Wedges .....Hoop tighteners.

Wedge Plate.....Arm gripper.

Wrist Rest .....Arm rest. Sleeve guard. Vellum guard.

Dirt damages banjos ! It will pay you to give your instrument an occasional overhaul. Clean all metal work with a clean duster and give all woodwork a polish with a good furniture cream. With a pointed matchstick, clear away the grime at the sides of the frets.

Plectrum-Banjo

THE PLECTRUM-BANJO has the same characteristics and scale length as the banjo but with only four strings. It has the same tuning and scale length as the banjo and is virtually the same instrument with a slightly narrowed neck and minus the octave (5th) string.

The plectrum-banjo is usually fitted with a resonator and, because it is normally used for dance-band work, it is invariably strung with special plectrum-banjo strings made of wire as follows:-

Special-gauge plated wire 1st and 2nd.
Heavy gauge wire-covered 3rd.
Wire-covered 4th.

Some players who use the plectrum-banjo purely for solo playing fit a nylon-filament 3rd and/or a nylon-covered 4th.

* * *

Tenor-Banjo

THE TENOR-BANJO has four strings, tuned:-

It has a shorter scale than the plectrum-banjo, with only nineteen frets on the fingerboard and, in fact looks like a plectrum-banjo with a slightly shorter neck. There has never been a "standard" scale length for the tenor-banjo—during its lifetime it has varied from as short as 19 inches to as long as 23 inches; each manufacturer having his own idea of what is the ideal. It can be mentioned that with the 23 inch scale it is almost impossible to procure a first string of sufficient tensile strength to withstand constant tuning to A.

Most tenor-banjos are fitted with a resonator. The instrument is always played with the plectrum and there are special strings for it—the 1st and 2nd being of plated wire and the 3rd and 4th being monel-covered.

* * *

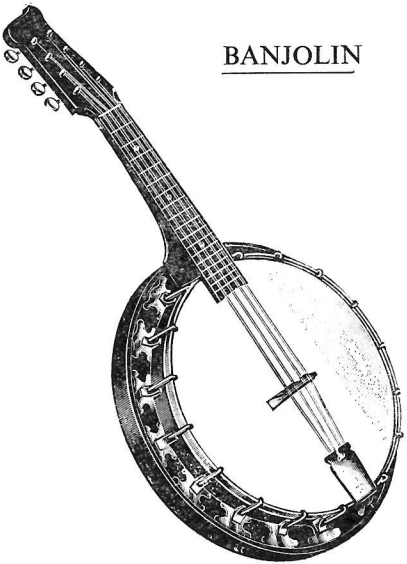
Banjolin

THE BANJOLIN has four single or eight double strings, tuned:-

The instrument looks like a stunted plectrum-banjo in its four-string form,

for it has a full size (11 inch) hoop but an arm only about half the length of the banjo. It has a scale length of 13 inches and the fingerboard usually extends a little over the vellum. The size of the vellum in relation to the string length results in a rather "tubby" tone. When such instruments have been made with a smaller hoop they have only succeeded in sounding "tinny".

This instrument is always played with the plectrum and was evolved to



BANJOLIN

enable mandolinists and violinists to look like "banjoists" when ragtime orchestras came into being.

The eight-string version of the banjolin (the four strings become "doubled" as on the mandolin) came into being to enable mandolinists to play a louder-voiced instrument.

The four-string banjolin is the instrument used in the B. M. & G. orchestra and in the banjo band.

The banjolin is always played with a plectrum and mandolin strings are used.

* * *

Mandolin-Banjo

THIS instrument has four "double" strings tuned the same as the banjolin/mandolin but it looks like a miniature zither-banjo with a vellum of only 4 inches or 5 inches in diameter. Such instruments are usually "cheap and nasty" and were sold originally for only a few shillings. They are always played with a plectrum and the sound produced is shrill and unmusical.

There were even four-string versions of this "instrument" produced but happily, like their eight-string relative, they are rarely encountered these days.

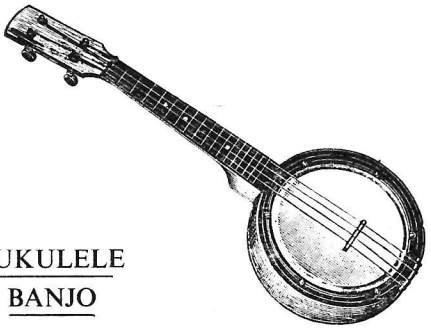
* * *

Ukulele-Banjo

THE UKULELE-BANJO has four strings—all gut or all nylon-filament—which are tuned:-

The diameter of the vellum of this instrument varies from 5 inches to 10 inches and it has a scale length of about 14 inches. The tuning is the same as the Hawaiian ukulele, from which it evolved. It is usually played with the right-hand fingers in a strumming manner, although some players use a soft felt plectrum for striking the strings.

Although solos can be played on it, it is mainly used for accompanying the voice.



UKULELE BANJO

The ukulele-banjo (which also appeared on the market under various trade names, such as "Banjulele," "Banjuke", etc.) has been favoured by many music-hall performers and had a considerable vogue between 1920-30 among people who had no inclination to learn any difficult instrumental technique.

The most famous performers who used a ukulele-banjo have been George Formby, "Billy" Scott, Tessie O'Shea and Wendell Hall.

There have been countless "variations" in the design of ukulele-banjos but basically they have all been smaller versions of the four-string banjo.

* * *

Banjeurine

THE BANJEURINE has five strings, tuned:-

It was invented by the American manufacturer S. S. Stewart in 1885 and was evolved to take the lead in the Banjo Club (orchestra) of that period. In theory it took the soprano voice in

the ensemble. Its tuning is the same intervals as the banjo but tuned a fourth higher and its pitch was, in fact, more of a tenor-banjo than the instrument that subsequently was so-called.

The banjeurine (spelled banjorine in Great Britain) enjoyed a vogue on both sides of the Atlantic for some time but when the banjolin became popular it was gradually discarded.

* * *

Piccolo Banjo

THE PICCOLO BANJO was virtually a half-size version of the banjo.

Everything about it—size of hoop, length of fingerboard, scale length—was exactly half the size of the normal banjo. It was evolved by S. S. Stewart for use in the banjo orchestra and played the melody with the leading banjos but "an octave higher".

Normal banjo strings were used on the piccolo banjo.

In England piccolo banjos were sometimes made in the form of a miniature zither-banjo but examples of either type of instrument are rarely encountered these days.

Guitar-Banjo

THE GUITAR-BANJO has six strings, tuned:-

This instrument is virtually a six-string banjo made to the scale length of the guitar. The hoop is usually 11 inches in diameter and the scale length approximately 25½ inches. The peg-head can be either six banjo-type pegs fitted as such, three each side, or a set of horizontal guitar machine-heads fitted in a slotted head *a la* guitar.

It is tuned to the same pitch as the guitar and normal guitar strings (gut and silk-covered in the early days) used. When the instrument is to be played with a plectrum, light gauge plectrum guitar strings would be fitted.

* * *

Rust on plain wire strings will cause out-of-tuneness and dull tone. Keep a small piece of rag impregnated with thin oil in your banjo case and always wipe the strings after use. Be sure to wipe *under* the strings as well as along the top.

Bass Banjo

THE BASS BANJO has four strings, tuned:-

In the early days of the B. M. & G. orchestra the 'cello from the symphony orchestra (and sometimes the double bass violin) were used to provide the low-toned voice(s) in the orchestrations. Then the bass and contra-bass banjos were designed (to "be in keeping with the other instruments") to take their place.

Tuned to the same pitch as the violincello, the correct name of the bass banjo should be "cello-banjo" (by which it is often known) but at the time of its introduction the manufacturers did not envisage any difficulty over nomenclature and the name "bass-banjo" has been widely used.

The scale length of the bass banjo is 27 inches (virtually the same as the banjo) but special thick strings are used to give the lower pitch and the vellum diameter is usually 13 inches or 14 inches, with the hoop approximately four inches deep. It is played in the

normal manner but with a stout leather plectrum to strike the strings.

In the early days of the instrument in England, bass banjos were made entirely of wood in circular form with a concave back.

* * *

Contra-Bass Banjo

THE CONTRA-BASS BANJO has three strings, tuned:-

The instrument is about five feet in length from tailpiece to peghead; the player standing behind it to play it. The vellum diameter is usually 18 inches and the instrument is supported by a long spike fixed to the lower arc of the hoop. Most had a wooden-type back (resonator) fitted to the hoop.

The first contra-bass banjos produced in England were, like the bass banjos, made entirely of wood in circular form with a concave back.

The instrument is played with a large leather plectrum gripped in the palm of the right hand.

Why not 'G'

THERE is one phrase used by the uninitiated—and by some people who should know better—the writer feels should be commented upon in this booklet. It is the term: "G BANJO"

A CONTRA-BASS BANJO PLAYER

It is a phrase that means nothing, for it is used by different people to mean different instruments. In fact, it is usually employed to denote *any* banjo except the tenor-banjo !

If the names used throughout this work are always employed, there can be no doubt which instrument is meant.

It is, perhaps, interesting to recall how the term "G Banjo" came into use. It started because American publishers of dance-band orchestrations labelled the part arranged for the tenor-banjo, as for "banjo". As the tenor-banjo was the only instrument of the vellum family being used in the dance band at that time in the U.S.A. their carelessness can, perhaps, be understood if not excused.

All American dance-band orchestrations in the '20's (before the advent of the plectrum-played guitar) contained this "banjo" part—but which was actually written for the tenor-banjo. These parts were reproduced (usually by photographic means) in the British issues—but most dance-band players in Great Britain were unfamiliar with the then new American tenor-banjo, being players of the plectrum-banjo.

Knowledgeable people of those days pointed out to the London music publishers that the dance-band parts they

were issuing were of no use to dance-band players of the banjo over here. The vast difference in tuning between the tenor-banjo and plectrum-banjo was pointed out to them—and they started to include proper plectrum-banjo parts in their orchestrations in addition to the tenor-banjo parts provided by the original American publishers. (The tenor-banjo was beginning to appear in the U.K.).

Some bright(?) publisher, having discovered that the plectrum-banjo was pitched in G, thought he would make doubly sure and differentiated between the tenor-banjo parts (still marked "banjo" by the American publishers!) and the new plectrum-banjo parts by labelling the latter "G Banjo".

The continued use of the prefix "G" has led to some puzzlement ever since, for banjoists often think it refers to an instrument of the banjo family different from the one they play.

There have been many varied reasons given for using the term "G Banjo"—"because my instrument has a short G string"; "because the open chord is G"; "it means played with a plectrum"; and, strangest of all, "because the original banjo had a low G string"!